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State Power and Class Interests

Work done in the last fifteen years or so by people writing within a broad Marxist perspective on the subject of the state in capitalist society now fills a great many bookshelves; and however critical one may be of one or other article, book or trend, it is undoubtedly very useful that this work should be available. There is, however, a very large gap in the literature, in so far as very little of it is specifically concerned with the question of the autonomy of the state.[1] How great a degree of autonomy does the state have in capitalist society? What purpose is its autonomy intended to serve? And what purposes does it actually serve? These and many other such questions are clearly of the greatest theoretical and practical importance, given the scope and actual or potential impact of state action upon the society over which the state presides, and often beyond. Yet, the issue has remained poorly explored and 'theorized' in the Marxist perspective.[2] The present article is intended as a modest contribution to the work that needs to be done on it.[3]

In the first volume of *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, Hal Draper very usefully sets out what Marx and Engels said on the subject of the autonomy of the state, and shows how large a place it occupied in their political thinking and writings.[4] It was also this that I was trying to suggest in an article on 'Marx and the State' published in 1965, where I noted, in a formulation which I do not find very satisfactory, that there was a 'secondary' view of the state in Marx (the first one being of the state as the 'instrument' of a ruling class so designated by virtue of its ownership or control—or both—of the main means of economic activity). This 'secondary' view was of the state 'as independent from and superior to all social classes, as being the dominant force in society rather than the instrument of a dominant class', with Bonapartism as 'the extreme manifestation of the state's independent role' in Marx's own lifetime.[5] On the other hand, I also noted then that, for Marx, the Bonapartist state, 'however independent it may have been politically from any given class, remains, and cannot in a class society but remain, the protector of an economically and socially dominant class'.[6] Some years later, in the course of a review of *Political Power and Social Classes* by the late and greatly-missed Nicos Poulantzas, I reformulated the point by suggesting that a distinction had to be made between the state autonomously acting *on behalf* of the ruling class, and its acting *at the behest* of that class, the latter notion being, I said, 'a vulgar deformation of the thought of Marx and Engels'.[7] What I was rejecting there was the crude view of the state as a mere 'instrument' of the ruling class obediently acting at its dictation.

The Debate over State 'Autonomy'

However, it is undoubtedly to Poulantzas that belongs the credit for the most thorough exploration of the concept of the autonomy of the state; and it was he who coined the formulation which has remained the basis for most subsequent discussion of the subject, namely the 'relative autonomy of the state'. In essence, the view that this formulation encapsulated was that the state might indeed have a substantial degree of autonomy, but that, nevertheless, it remained for all practical purposes the state of the ruling class.

There has been considerable discussion among Marxists and others about

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[1] For an interesting survey of the bulk of this literature, see Bob Jessop, *The Capitalist State: Marxist Theories and Methods*, London 1982. The autonomy of the state, however, is not accorded any particular attention in this book and does not appear in the index.

[2] For a recent discussion of the subject by a 'mainstream' political scientist, which shows well how limited is an approach that takes no serious account of the state's capitalist context, see E. Nordlinger, *On the Autonomy of the Democratic State*, New York 1981. Actual case studies are discussed in S. D. Krasner, *Defending the National Interest: Raw Materials Investments and US Foreign Policy*, New York 1978.

[3] This article is exclusively concerned with 'late' capitalist societies. The question presents itself rather differently in countries in the capitalist world which are poorly developed, and very differently indeed in Soviet-type regimes. Here again serious theoretical work has only commenced.

[4] Volume One: *State and Bureaucracy*, New York 1977, Chs 14–23.

[5] See my 'Marx and the State', in *The Socialist Register 1965*, London 1965, p. 283.

[6] *Ibid*, p. 285.

[7] See my 'Poulantzas and the Capitalist State', in *NLR 82* (November–December 1973), p. 85, footnote 4.

the nature of the constraints and pressures which cause the state to serve the needs of capital—notably whether these constraints and pressures were 'structural' and impersonal, or produced by a ruling class armed with an arsenal of formidable weapons and resources. But beyond the differences that were expressed in these discussions, there was also a fundamental measure of agreement that the state *was* decisively constrained by forces *external to it*, and that the constraints originated in the national and international capitalist context in which it operated. The state might be constrained by the imperative requirement of capital for its reproduction and accumulation; or by the pressure from lobbies and organizations and agencies at the service of capital or one or other of its 'fractions'; or by the combined impact of these and international forces such as other capitalist states or the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund. But *these* at any rate were the kind of factors which had to be taken into account to explain the actions of the state. As has occasionally been noted in this connection, this Marxist view of the state as impelled by forces external to it shares its 'problematic' with the liberal or 'democratic pluralist' view of the state, notwithstanding the other profound differences between them: whereas the Marxist view attributes the main constraints upon the state to capital or capitalists or both, the 'democractic pluralist' one attributes them to the various pressures exercised upon a basically democratic state by a plurality of competing groups, interests and parties in society. In both perspectives, the state does not originate action but responds to external forces: it may *appear* to be the 'historical subject', but is in fact the object of processes and forces at work in society.

It is this whole perspective which has come under challenge in recent years, not only from the right, which has long insisted on the primacy of the state, but from people strongly influenced by Marxism. Two notable examples of this challenge are Ellen Kay Trimberger's *Revolution from Above: Military Bureaucrats and Development in Japan, Turkey, Egypt and Peru*,[8] and more explicitly Theda Skocpol's much-acclaimed *States and Social Revolution*,[9] which is, however, not concerned with the contemporary state but with the state in relation to the French, Russian and Chinese Revolutions.[10]

In the Marxist tradition, Skocpol writes, 'whatever the variations of its historical forms, the state as such is seen as a feature of all class-divided modes of production; and, invariably, the one necessary and inescapable function of the state—by definition—is to contain class conflict and to undertake other policies in support of the dominance of the surplus-appropriating and property-owning class.' This, she argues, fails to treat the state 'as an autonomous structure—a structure with a logic and interests of its own not necessarily equivalent to, or fused with, the interests of the dominant class in society or the full set of member groups in the polity.'[11]

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[8] New York 1977.

[9] Cambridge 1979.

[10] See also Fred Block, 'The Ruling Class Does Not Rule', *Socialist Revolution 33*, (May–June 1977); and 'Beyond Relative Autonomy', in *The Socialist Register 1980*, London 1980, where he speaks of the 'relative autonomy thesis' as a 'cosmetic modification of Marxism's tendency to reduce state power to class power'. (p. 229).

[11] Skocpol, p. 27.

This seems to me to be a valid criticism: the Marxist tradition does tend to under-emphasize or simply to ignore the fact that the state does have interests of its own or, to put it rather more appropriately, that the people who run it believe it has and do themselves have interests of their own. The failure to make due allowance for this naturally inhibits or prevents the exploration of the ways in which class interests and state interests are related and reconciled.

For her part, Skocpol goes much further than merely stating that the state has interests of its own or that those who run it do have such interests. For she goes on to argue that the Marxist perspective makes it 'virtually impossible even to raise the possibility that fundamental conflicts of interest might arise between the existing dominant class or set of groups, on the one hand, and the state rulers on the other'.[12] But contrary to what she appears to believe, this second argument does not follow from the first, and in fact raises an entirely different question, of great interest, but which should not be confused with the first one. That first proposition refers to the interests which the state may have of its own, and leaves open the question of how these may be reconciled with other interests in society. The second proposition, on the other hand, assumes that the state may have interests 'fundamentally' opposed to those of all forces and interests in society. This is a much stronger version of the autonomy of the state, and needs to be discussed separately from the other, and much weaker, one.

The Scope of State Action

Perhaps the first thing to note in this discussion is how very large is the sphere of action which the state in capitalist societies does have in all areas of life. It is deeply and pervasively involved in every aspect of economic life. It is a permanent and active presence in class conflict and in every other kind of conflict. It plays a great and growing role in the manipulation of opinion and in the 'engineering of consent'. It has, in Max Weber's famous phrase, a 'monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force'. It is alone responsible for international affairs and for deciding what the level and character of the country's armaments should be.

To speak of 'the state' in this manner is of course to use a shorthand which can be misleading. The reference is to certain people who are in charge of the executive power of the state—presidents, prime ministers, their cabinets and their top civilian and military advisers. But this assumes a unity of views and interests which may not exist: great divisions between the people concerned are in fact very common, with ministers at odds with their colleagues, and civilian and military advisers at odds with their political superiors. If these divisions are so deep as to make a workable compromise impossible and as to paralyse the executive power, some kind of reconstruction of the decision-making apparatus has to occur. In the end, decisions do have to be made; and it is the executive power which makes them, 'on its own'.

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[12] *Ibid.*

No doubt, there are many powerful influences and constraints, from outside the state, international as well as indigenous, which affect the nature of the decisions taken; and these may well be very strong and compelling. But it is ultimately a very small group of people in the state—often a single person—who decide what is to be done or not done; and it is only in very exceptional cases that those who make the decisions are left with no range of choice at all. Much more often, there is some degree of choice: even where governments are subjected to the imperative will of other governments, they are usually left with some freedom of decision in relation to matters which directly and greatly affect the lives of those whom they govern. Perhaps the best way to highlight the meaning of the autonomy of the state is to note that if nuclear war should occur, either between the 'superpowers' or between lesser powers armed with the capacity to wage such a war, it will occur because governments will have so decided, without reference to anybody else. There is no democractic procedure for starting a nuclear war.

The degree of autonomy which the state enjoys for most purposes in relation to social forces in capitalist society depends above all on the extent to which class struggle and pressure from below challenge the hegemony of the class which is dominant in such a society. Where a dominant class is truly hegemonic in economic, social, political and cultural terms, and therefore free from any major and effective challenge from below, the chances are that the state itself will also be subject to its hegemony, and that it will be greatly constrained by the various forms of class power which the dominant class has at its disposal. Where, on the other hand, the hegemony of a dominant class is persistently and strongly challenged, the autonomy of the state is likely to be substantial, to the point where, in conditions of intense class struggle and political instability, it may assume 'Bonapartist' and authoritarian forms, and emancipate itself from constraining constitutional checks and controls.

It is worth noting that the capitalist class has very seldom enjoyed anything like full hegemony in economic, social, political and cultural terms. One major capitalist country where it has come nearest to such hegemony is the United States—the prime example in the capitalist world of a society where business has not had to share power with an entrenched aristocracy, and where it has also been able to avoid the emergence of a serious political challenge by organized labour. Everywhere else, business has had to reach an accomodation with previously established social forces, and meet the challenge of labour. Moreover, it has also had to deal with state structures of ancient provenance and encrusted power that were strongly resistant to change. Capitalist hegemony has therefore been much more contested and partial in the rest of the 'late' capitalist world than in the United States; and even in the United States, economic and social contradictions and pressure from below, particularly since the Great Depression, have strengthened the state and given it greater autonomy than it enjoyed between, say, the Civil War and the Great Depression.

The idea that class struggle is of decisive importance in determining the

nature and form of the state is a familiar part of classical Marxism;[13] and so too is the view that the purpose of the state's autonomy is the better to protect and serve the existing social order and the dominant class which is the main beneficiary of that social order. As I noted earlier, it is this latter proposition which is under challenge; and rightly so. For the question: 'What is the state's autonomy *for*?' cannot simply be answered in these familiar terms: the point is *not* that these terms are wrong; but rather that they are inadequate to explain the dynamic of state action and cannot provide a satisfactory 'model' of the state in relation to society in a capitalist context. The dynamic of state action is explained by Marxism in terms of the imperative requirements of capital or the inexorable pressure of capitalists; and these are indeed of very great importance. But to focus exclusively on them is to leave out of account other very powerful impulses to state action generated from within the state by the people who are in charge of the decision-making power. These impulses undoubtedly exist; and they cannot be taken to be synonymous with the purposes of dominant classes.

The Impulses of Executive Power

The two main impulses which are generated by the executive power of the state are self-interest on the one hand, and a conception of the 'national interest' on the other.

People in power wish for the most part to retain it. It is a spurious kind of worldy wisdom which affirms that all 'politicians' and people in power are moved by nothing but self-interest and are only concerned to serve themselves by acquiring and clinging to office. But it is naive to think that, whatever else moves such people, they are not also moved by self-interest, meaning above all the wish to obtain and retain power. Of one man of power, the late Lyndon Johnson, President of the United States, it has been said that he exhibited from early days 'the desire to dominate, the *need* to dominate, to bend others to his will . . . the overbearingness with subordinates that was as striking as the obsequiousness with superiors . . . the viciousness and cruelty, the joy in breaking backs and keeping them broken, the urge not just to defeat but to destroy . . . above all, the ambition, the all-encompassing personal ambition that made issues impediments and scruples superfluous. And present also was the fear—the loneliness, the terrors, the insecurities—that underlay, and made savage, the aggressiveness, the energy and the ambition.'[14]

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[13] See Marx's famous description of the Second Empire as 'the only form of government possible at a time when the bourgeoisie had already lost, and the working class had not yet acquired, the faculty of ruling the nation' (*The Civil War in France*, in *Selected Works* (1950), I, p. 470). Also Engels's equally well-known remark: 'By way of exception, however, periods occur in which the warring classes balance each other so nearly that the state power, as ostensible mediator, acquires, for the moment, a certain degree of independence of both' (*The Origin of the Family, Property and the State*, ibid., II, p. 290). For many other such examples, see Draper, *op. cit*.

[14] The quotation appears in Murray Kempton, 'The Great Lobbyist', in *New York Review of Books*, 17 February 1983; and is drawn from R. A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power*, New York 1982.

No doubt, Lyndon Johnson was a very repulsive politician. But the sentiments and motives ascribed to him are hardly unique; and the different terms that may be used to describe the drives of other men and women in power do not affect the point: this is that there are many people for whom the exercise of great power is an exceedingly satisfying experience, for whose sake acts of extraordinary cruelty have been committed throughout history. The point would hardly be worth making if it was not so imperfectly integrated into the Marxist view of the state.

The reason for this, or at least one reason for it, has already been touched on, and lies in Marxism's emphasis on economic and social processes as determinants of political action. The emphasis is perfectly legitimate but is easily deformed into an under-estimation of the weight which political processes themselves do have. The tendency to one form or another of 'economic reductionism' has had a marked influence on the Marxist discussion of politics and the state, even when the deformation has been acknowledged and pledges made to correct it.

The state is not the only institution which makes the exercise of great power possible; but it is by far the most important one. Nor does it only make possible the exercise of power as such, crucial though that is: it is also the source of high salaries, status, privilege and access to well-paid and otherwise desirable positions outside the state.[15] Nor is this only relevant for those people who are at the very center of the decision-making process. Thousands of people in the upper reaches of the state are involved, whom the state provides with high salaries and all that goes with state service at this level, not only in government departments, but also in innumerable boards, commissions, councils and other public bodies. Such people constitute a 'state bourgeoisie', linked to but separate from those who are in charge of corporate capitalist enterprise. Their first concern is naturally with their jobs and careers. Capitalist interests are in no danger of being overlooked; but they are not the sole or primary concern of these office holders.

Those who seek state power find it easy to persuade themselves that their achievement of it, and their continued hold on it, are synonymous with the 'national interest', whose service, they proclaim, is their paramount and overriding consideration. Here too, it would be short-sighted to treat these proclamations as mere sham, and as elicited purely by the wish to obtain and retain state power. It is much more reasonable to think that people in power *are* moved by what they conceive to be the 'national interest', in addition to being deeply concerned with their own jobs. This is all the more likely to be the case in that the 'national interest' is woven into a larger and very powerful sentiment, namely nationalism. There was in classical Marxism the hope and belief that a different sentiment, namely

[15] A recent example is provided by Sir David McNee, who retired in 1982 as Metropolitan Police Commissioner, and who was appointed non-executive chairman of the Scottish *Express* Newspapers: 'Sir David, who left last September on an index-linked pension of £22,000, will be paid between £5,000 and £10,000 for the job. He recently sold his memoirs to the *Sunday Mirror* for £120,000, joined Clydesdale Bank for £5,000 a year as non-executive director, and in November the British Airways Board for £10,000 a year. In December he was nominated president of the National Bible Society of Scotland' (*The Guardian*, 27 January 1983).

proletarian or revolutionary internationalism, would move not only the working class but its leaders, in opposition but also in power. The collapse of internationalism in 1914 dealt a shattering blow to this hope; and so, in different ways, did the fact that the Soviet regime alone survived the revolutionary convulsions which followed the First World War. Even if manifestations of revolutionary internationalism may occasionally be read into the actions of people in power (Cuba in Africa?), it is nationalism and what is taken to be the 'national interest' which everywhere form the main and even the exclusive frame of reference for state action today; and this is easily compatible with the pursuit of the self-interest of those who control state power.

If it is agreed that self-interest and a conception of the 'national interest' have been and are powerful influences in shaping the policies and actions of the people in control of state power, the question which immediately arises is how this relates to the interests of the dominant class—in other words, what is the relationship of state power to class interests?

The answer is that, throughout the history of capitalism, that relationship has on the whole been very good. The people in charge of the state have generally been strongly imbued with the belief that the 'national interest' was bound up with the well-being of capitalist enterprise, or at least that no conceivable alternative arrangement, least of all socialism, could possibly be more advantageous to the 'national interest'; and they have therefore been particularly attentive to the interests of capitalist enterprise, whatever view they might take of capitalists. However, being attentive to these interests might well mean refusing to pay heed to capitalist wishes: very often, it was precisely because they wanted to ensure the best conditions for capitalism that they did things which ran counter to the wishes of capitalists.

A certain tension between state power and class interests is in fact inevitable, however good their relationship may fundamentally be. The dynamic of capitalism is the reproduction and accumulation of capital, and the maximization of long-term profit for each individual firm. This is the paramount aim, the all but exclusive concern of those who are in charge of the private sector of economic life: all else passes through this and must be subordinate to it. But this cannot be the dynamic of state power. For those who control that power, the 'national interest' in essence requires the defence of the existing social order against any internal challenge to it, and also the best defence they believe they can mount against commercial, military and ideological competition from other states. Of course, this may also include, and often has included, offensive action abroad. These twin concerns encompass, or at least seek to encompass, capitalist class interests: but this is not at all the same as saying that state action and these class interests precisely coincide. In fact, there is always likely to be some unhingement between what the state does, however much those who control it may be devoted to capitalist interests, and these interests. The state, for instance, needs revenue; and it cannot obtain all the revenue it needs from the subordinate classes. It must levy taxes upon capital and capitalists, and thereby drain off some of the surplus which accrues to them: hence the constant lamentations of businessmen, large and small, about the state's taxation policies, and their

complaints that the state, in its blind bureaucratic and greedy bungling, is forever undermining private enterprise. Similarly with reform and regulation: the containment of pressure from below, and indeed the maintenance of a viable and efficient labour force, demand that the state should undertake some measures of reform and regulation, which capital finds disagreeable and constraining, and which it certainly would not undertake on its own.

State and Class: a Partnership?

In short, an accurate and realistic 'model' of the relationship between the dominant class in advanced capitalist societies and the state is one of *partnership between two different, separate forces*, linked to each other by many threads, yet each having its own separate sphere of concerns. The terms of that partnership are not fixed but constantly shifting, and affected by many different circumstances, and notably by the state of class struggle. It is not at any rate a partnership in which the state may be taken necessarily to be the junior partner. On the contrary, the contradictions and shortcomings of capitalism, and the class pressures and social tensions this produces, require the state to assume an ever more pronounced role in the defence of the social order. The end of that process is one form or another of 'Bonapartism'. Meanwhile, it makes for a steady inflation of state power within the framework of a capitalist-democratic order whose democratic features are under permanent threat from the partnership of state and capital.

This 'model' of partnership seeks to give due importance to the independent and 'self-regarding' role of the state, and to make full allowance for what might be called the Machiavellian dimension of state action, which Marxism's 'class-reductionist' tendencies have obscured.[16] This is not a question of the 'primacy of politics': that formulation goes rather too far the other way, and suffers from a 'state-reductionist' bias.

By speaking of partnership between the state and the dominant class, I seek to avoid both forms of 'reductionism': the notion makes allowance for all the space which political and state action obviously has in practice; but it also acknowledges a capitalist context which profoundly affects everything the state does, particularly in economic matters where capitalist interests are directly involved. The idea of the 'primacy of politics' tends to abstract from the hard reality of this capitalist context: but no government can be indifferent to it. So long as a government works within it, so long does the partnership hold. If it seeks to pose a fundamental threat to capitalist interests, or a threat which capitalist interests judge to be fundamental, the partnership is dissolved and replaced by the determination of these interests to see the government destroyed. Nor in such a case is that determination likely to be confined to

[16] Thus, Göran Therborn dissolves state power into class power when he asserts that 'state power is a relation between social class forces expressed in the content of state policies' (*What Does the Ruling Class Do When It Rules?*, NLB. London 1978, p. 34). Note also Jessop's characterization of Poulantzas's view of the state: 'The state reflects and condenses all the contradictions in a class-divided social formation . . . political practices are always class practices . . . state power is always the power of a definite class to whose interests the state corresponds' (op. cit., p. 159).

capitalist interests: it would be shared to the full by many other forces in society, and by people located in the state itself—military people, top civil servants, and many others.

The notion of partnership is scarcely contradicted by the experience of the governments of the left which have come to power (or to office) in capitalist countries in this century. For all practical purposes, the partnership has endured between such governments and capital, perhaps with more tensions and disagreements than when governments of the right have been in office, but not so as to bring about a complete break in relations. Great antagonism to the government might be expressed by members of the dominant class, business interests and their many agencies; but there was always a clear understanding on the part of these class forces that, even though the government might be doing some reprehensible things, it was also seeking to maintain the existing social order, to help business, to discipline and subdue labour, and to defend, in international and defence matters (and in colonial ones in an earlier day), what dominant class interests and the government both agreed to be the 'national interest'. In any case, capital also knew that it was only a small part of the state that was now in alien hands: the top reaches of the civil service, the police, the military, the judiciary remained more or less intact, and vigilantly concerned to limit the damage which the government might do. Moreover, the hegemony exercised by the dominant class in civil society was never much affected by the arrival in office of a government of the left. All the 'earthworks' which that dominant class occupied remained under its control. On the other hand, governments of the left have always sought to contain the activism of their own supporters and to bid them wait patiently and obediently for socialist ministers to get on with their tasks. The one case where the partnership between a government of the left and dominant class interests *was* broken was that of Salvador Allende's government in Chile. Given that break, the government's only hope of obviating the dangers which it faced was to forge a new partnership between itself and the subordinate classes. It was unable to achieve this, or did not sufficiently strive to achieve it. Its autonomy was also its death warrant.

This proposed model of partnership stands in opposition to Theda Skocpol's model of the 'state for itself' referred to earlier. According to that model, it will be recalled, 'fundamental conflicts of interest might arise between the existing dominant class or set of groups, on the one hand, and the state rulers on the other'. In this view, the state would be no one's partner or ally: it would be 'for itself' and against all classes and groups in society. In relation to countries with a solid class structure and a well-entrenched dominant class, such a model does not seem appropriate. For it is surely very difficult to see, in such countries, what the interests of 'state rulers' would be which would also place these rulers in *fundamental* conflict with *all* classes or groups in society. I have already noted that there are things which the state wants and does, and which are very irksome to the dominant class: but this is a very different matter from there being a fundamental conflict between them. Moreover, if such a conflict between them did occur, the state would in all likelihood be acting in ways that would favour some other class or classes. In other words, a new partnership would have been created; or the state would be

acting, for whatever reason, in favour of a class or classes without any such partnership having been established. In neither case would the state be 'neutral', or acting solely 'for itself'.

Of course, state rulers, in pursuing what they conceive to be their interest, and the 'national interest', may use the autonomy they have to adopt policies and take actions which turn out to be disadvantageous or disastrous for everybody (quite possibly including those who took the decisions). History is full of such failures of statecraft; and recent examples abound. Thus, it may be argued that the American decision to wage war in Vietnam was very disadvantageous to all classes in the United States, not to speak of the disaster it represented for the people of Vietnam. But it can hardly be claimed that the decision to wage war in Vietnam was taken in the interests of state rulers in fundamental opposition to the interests of the capitalist class in the United States. On the contrary, there was a perfectly good 'fit' between the two, as witness the support which most capitalist interests there gave to the war until its very end. Another instance is that of Hitler's expansionist ventures, including his decision to take Germany into war. This turned out badly for everybody concerned: but there was no fundamental opposition between business interests in Germany and the Nazi leaders; and here again, there was ample support from business for Nazi policies. In this case, however, it is possible to argue that the Nazi regime provides an example of the interests of those in charge of the state being fundamentally opposed to the interests of everybody else: the war was clearly lost by 1943, and the only people whose interest it was *not* to bring it to an end were the Nazi leaders. Other instances of this sort could no doubt be adduced. But they do not provide a firm basis for a 'model' of the state as being 'for itself' and against everybody else.

State Power under Socialism

It seems to me that the 'model' of partnership advanced here can be useful in defining the relationship of the state to the working class in a socialist society. In the classical Marxist perspective, this relationship is defined in terms of the dictatorship of the proletariat. As may be deduced from Marx's *Civil War in France*, and as it is presented in Lenin's *The State and Revolution*, this means in effect the virtual dissolution of state power into class power. The state is not abolished but its functions and powers become largely residual and subordinate. Göran Therborn is well within this tradition in saying that 'a strategy for socialism or for a transitional stage of "advanced democracy" must dismantle the government, administration, judicial and repressive apparatus of the existing bourgeois state', and in urging 'a political programme of changes in the organization of the state that will bring about a popular democracy'.[17]

For their part, both social democratic and Communist parties have adopted perspectives and strategies of a very different kind, according to which class power is strictly subordinated to state power. For social democracy, class power has always tended to mean the deployment of electoral strength by the working class and the election of a social

[17] Therborn, p. 25.

democratic or labour government. Once this is achieved, the task of the 'voters' is done, save for the routine activities of the party or parties which support the government. Indeed, any manifestation of class power (for instance strike action) is frowned upon, disowned and opposed.

Communist parties place a greater emphasis in their pronouncements and programmes on grassroots activism, but the focus tends to be on the achievement of legislative and ministerial power in what is in effect the old state with a partially renewed personnel. Whatever might happen to the hegemony of the dominant class, it is not on this basis likely to be inherited by the hitherto subordinate classes. Partnership between state power and class power in a socialist context means something rather different. It requires the achievement of real power by organs of popular representation in all spheres of life, from the workplace to local government; and it also involves the thorough democratization of the state system and the strengthening of democratic control upon every aspect of it. But it nevertheless also means that state power endures and that the state does not, in any strong sense, 'wither away'. It must, in fact, long continue to remain in being and carry out many functions which it alone can fulfil. Indeed, it requires some degree of autonomy to carry them out. For the working class is not a homogeneous bloc, with one clear interest and one voice; and the state alone is capable of acting as a mediator between the 'fractions' which constitute the newly hegemonic majority. Furthermore, it is also upon the state that falls a large part of the responsibility for safeguarding the personal, civic and political freedoms which are intrinsic to the notion of socialist citizenship. In this sense, and with proper controls, state power in a post-capitalist society is not in conflict with class power, but its essential complement.